

The need for and potentials of recycled water

By DORIS ENRIQUEZ-MALABAD

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — People flock to San Diego for its near-perfect weather - not too cold, not too warm. The clear, sunny sky of this part of Southern California is being invied for it provides just the right warmth that one cannot find in the other states. And when you add to that the gentle breeze that's coming from the ocean, then you are in to the best weather in the land.

There's one set-back, though. It seldom rains. Except for the recent months when rains came quite often after so many years. But generally speaking, San Diego county is not visited by rains too often.

Which leads to one of the perennial problems that the government of San Diego faces - water shortage.

Thus, efforts have been exerted from various fronts to conserve water. But in its scarcity, water conservation alone cannot

solve the problem. And so, the idea of re-using used water has surfaced through recycled or reclaimed water. Simply put, the waste water from household, industrial and commercial use need not be 'wasted' but can be 'processed' still to achieve a level where it can still be used for irrigation, manufacturing and other non-drinking or non-potable purposes.

The Water Reuse Study

To address this concern, the City of San Diego came up with a project called Water Reuse Study. It was approved by the San Diego City Council on January 13, 2004, and a study team was assembled. The study will be a comprehensive, impartial, balanced, and science-based review of all recycled water opportunities for the City.

The public's participation in the Water Reuse Study is a top priority. A wide range of meet-

ings, workshops, online survey, stakeholders meeting and other communication opportunities have been and are still being set up to facilitate dialog and information sharing between city residents and the study team.

The Water Department thus says, "We need to diversify our sources of water. Over 90 percent of what we use now is imported from hundreds of miles away. So we're looking at a source that's produced right here - recycled water. It's already being used for irrigation and commercial purposes, but we believe we can do more."

The North City and South Bay Plants

In line with the objective of meeting future water demands and avoid shortages, while reducing the dependence on imported water, the City of San Diego has built the North City Water Reclamation Plant and the South Bay Water Reclamation Plant. These plants treat wastewater to a level that is approved for irrigation, manufacturing and other non-drinking,

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or non-potable purposes. The North City Plant has the capability to treat 30 million gallons a day and the South Bay Plant can treat 15 million gallons a day. Recycled water, also referred to as reclaimed water, gives San Diego a dependable, year-round, locally controlled water resource. Using recycled water is cost-effective, reliable and good for the environment.

The South Bay Water Reclamation Plant (SBWRP) is located at the intersection of Dairy Mart and Monument Roads in the Tijuana River Valley. The plant relieves the South Metro Sewer Interceptor System and provides local wastewater treatment services and reclaimed water to the South Bay. The plant opened in May 2002. The plant design incorporates the newest technologies in waste water treatment.

Recycled water overview

Recycled water (sometimes known as reclaimed water) is approved for nearly all uses. Careful monitoring by State health officials and water quality-control agencies ensures that the City of San Diego's recycled water meets all federal, state and local water quality standards.

According to the strict standards set out in Title 22 of the California Code of Regulations,

recycled water is also safe for all human contact (except drinking directly). For more than 50 years, recycled water has been safely used throughout the country in recreational lakes, sprinkler systems for homes and businesses, food crop irrigation and manufacturing processes. Since recycled water is used for non-drinking uses, a separate set of distribution pipelines has been built to deliver recycled water from the North City Water Reclamation Plant to users in the northern part of San Diego and the South Bay Water Reclamation plant to those in south San Diego. With further advanced treatment, recycled water has been approved as an addition to existing water supplies in underground basins and open reservoirs. This process is called groundwater recharge or reservoir augmentation and is occurring in other parts of California and the United States, but it is not occurring in San Diego at this time.

More than 210 sites in the Torrey Pines, UCSD, University City, Miramar Road, Carroll Canyon, Mira Mesa, Scripps Ranch and Sabre Springs areas use recycled water. The City of San Diego is constantly expanding the distribution zone in order to make recycled water available to more customers. Among the biggest current users are Caltrans, UCSD, Torrey Pines Golf Course, Nissan Design, Qualcomm, Metro Biosolids, Miramar Landfill, San Diego Com-

munity College and the City of Poway.

While irrigation is the most popular use for recycled water, it has multiple industrial applications including for cooling tower operations, dust suppression and universal cleaning elements for aggregates, transport equipments, printed circuit boards etc. It's important to note that recycled water is cheaper than potable water and, in case of a drought, is a more reliable supply.

The City of San Diego Water Department has a staff of recycled water experts available to work with customers on retrofitting their properties. Once a customer begins service, the cost of recycled water is significantly less than the potable water rate. If you would like to find out how to sign up for recycled water service, send an email to water@sandiego.gov or call the Hotline at (619) 515-3500.

Members of the study team are available to speak to your community group, organization, special interest club or service organization. Any size audience is welcome and speakers can use a variety of formats to meet the needs of your group's meeting place. Presentations are also available in Spanish.

To request a speaker, please call (619) 533-6638 or e-mail waterspeakers@SanDiego.gov.

For more information about the Recycled Water Program, e-mail at water@sandiego.gov or call the Water Department's Hotline at (619) 515-3500.

The City's Water Department has been providing safe and reliable drinking water to San Diego residents for over 100 years. It is dedicated to meeting San Diego's current and future water supply needs. But even with continued conservation measures, by 2030, the City will need 25 percent more water than we are using now.

It's a tough challenge, yet it should and will be met. (*With reports from www.sandiego.gov/water*)